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#### TESTIMONY

February 18, 2009  
Appropriations Committee  
CT General Assembly

My name is Patrick Johnson and I am President of The Connecticut Institute for the Blind which does business as Oak Hill. Oak Hill is the largest private non-profit agency providing community based care through 109 sites in 58 towns here in CT. Our annual operating budget is 80,000,000 and we have 1,400 employees. 800 of our employees are members of District 1199 of the New England Health Care Workers Union. Oak Hill provides group homes and day programs to 500 people with severe disabilities. Most have multiple disabilities. My brother-in-law, Francis, is a good example. He has been totally blind since birth, he is profoundly mentally retarded and he is autistic. Long before I became President of Oak Hill my family was a customer. I have a second brother-in-law who lives with his 83 year old mother. He too is totally blind and developmentally disabled and can not live independently. My mother-in-law is in a constant state of anxiety about what will happen to the son who lives with her if anything happens to her. My wife is legal guardian for her brother Francis and shares the same anxiety that the families of all people with severe disabilities face in light of declining resources to assure the safety and adequate care for people with severe disabilities.

The Governor's budget for the Dept. of Social Services has frozen the rates for room and board for the 60 group homes we manage and our 16 intermediate care facilities. It is easy to say rates are frozen but those room and board rates pay for heat, electricity, hot water, cooking fuel, and food. Those costs go up every year and my agency will have our deficit increased by \$500,000 to \$800,000 just for room and board and \$400,000 to \$725,000 for the intermediate care facilities. Our total operating deficit will grow to \$7.8 million in FY 2010 and approach \$9 million on 2011. My staff has not had a raise equal to or above the consumer price index in the last ten to 20 years and no one gets a raise in FY09. We have caps on many costs like wages but we can not cap what we do not control and we have to feed people and keep the heat and lights on but this budget provides no recognition of that.

The state of CT is now confronting what private providers have been confronting for the past two decades. Our revenue is less than our expenses and has been for a long time. We are running anorexic organizations with all that could be cut having been cut. The only thing left to cut in FY 2010 is the programs themselves. This will require the state to put them out to bid at 2010 costs and without charitable subsidies and who in their right mind would bid on them knowing that next year they will get a zero increase. The people we serve can not go onto the street or into shelters. They need supervision and support all day every day for the remainder of their lives. We can't do it alone anymore and this year we need your help to rescue private providers who, with over 70% in deficit, and on the verge of collapse constitute your most efficient and effective delivery system.

Patrick J. Johnson Jr.  
President of Oak Hill